Mediastinoscopy: Lymph Node Biopsy
When You Need Mediastinoscopy

Your doctor thinks that you have a lung problem. Something suspicious may have been found on a test. Your doctor now recommends that you have **mediastinoscopy**. This is a surgical procedure done to learn more about problems in the middle of the chest, or the area between the two lungs (**mediastinum**). **Biopsy** (removal of tissue samples) is done at the same time. Mediastinoscopy can help your doctor diagnose a lung problem and choose the best treatment for you, if needed.

Signs of a Possible Chest or Lung Problem

Problems in the chest or lungs can cause some of the following symptoms:

- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Dark or bloody sputum
- Hoarseness
- Trouble swallowing

Tests You May Have Had

You may have already had tests, such as a chest x-ray and other imaging tests, or a sputum test. If a problem was found, mediastinoscopy may be needed to confirm the problem. Depending on the results, you may need to see more than one healthcare specialist to further diagnose or treat the problem.
Quit Smoking for Good

If you smoke, there is no better time to quit than right now. Smoking leads to cancer and other lung problems. So talk to your doctor about getting help. He or she can provide you with resources to help you quit smoking for good.

What You Will Learn

This product will help you understand more about mediastinoscopy and what to expect with the procedure. If you still have questions after reading this product, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she can address any concerns you have.

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Anatomy of the Chest and Lungs

The space inside the chest where the lungs are found is called the chest cavity. The lungs take up most of the chest cavity. They are protected by the chest wall, which is made up of the ribs, breastbone, and muscles. The lungs are divided into sections called lobes (three in the right lung, two in the left). The lungs are separated from the abdomen by the diaphragm (breathing muscle). Air flows into and out of the lungs through bronchial tubes (breathing passages).

The Mediastinum

The mediastinum is the area between the two lungs. The heart, trachea, esophagus, bronchial tubes, and lymph nodes are in the mediastinum. The spine is at the back of the mediastinum and the breastbone is at the front.
What Your Doctor Is Looking For

A number of problems can affect the lungs and chest. These include masses, infections, and other diseases. Mediastinoscopy can help your doctor determine what the problem is and how serious it may be. Common types of chest and lung problems are listed below.

Masses

A mass is a lump of abnormal tissue that can occur anywhere in the lungs or chest. It can be **benign** (not cancerous) or **malignant** (cancerous). If a mass is found, the doctor will take a tissue sample of it. This tissue sample helps the doctor determine if the mass is cancerous. Depending on the mass, it may need to be removed. If a mass is cancerous, mediastinoscopy may be used to see if the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes.

Infections

Infections are illnesses caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Examples of lung infections include tuberculosis and pneumonia. Lung infections can irritate the airways. They can also cause fluid buildup in the lungs or chest. Tissue samples taken during a mediastinoscopy can help detect certain types of infection.

Diseases

Certain diseases are more likely to involve the lungs and mediastinum. These include lymphoma and sarcoidosis. Lymphoma is a type of cancer that affects lymph tissue throughout the body, including in the lungs. Sarcoidosis is a disease that causes swelling (inflammation) of tissues and organs in the body. It often starts in the lungs and can also affect the lymph nodes.
How Mediastinoscopy Is Done

Mediastinoscopy allows the doctor to see inside the mediastinum and check for problems. Tissue samples are removed from the lymph nodes in this area during the procedure. These samples are examined in a lab. They help determine if a lung problem involves infection, cancer, or other diseases. Mediastinoscopy requires an incision. It may take a few days to recover.

Preparing for the Procedure

Before your procedure, do the following:

- Follow your doctor’s instructions about eating and drinking.
- Tell your doctor about the medications you take. You may need to stop taking certain medications before the procedure, especially aspirin, Coumadin, or other blood thinners.
- Discuss any allergies and health problems with your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant.

The Day of the Procedure

Be sure to arrive at the hospital on time. Here’s what to expect:

- You’ll be asked to sign some forms and change into a hospital gown.
- An IV (intravenous) line is started in your arm. It delivers fluids and medications. This includes general anesthesia (medication to make you sleep and keep you from feeling pain) during the procedure.

Risks and Complications

Your doctor will discuss the risks and possible complications of the procedure with you. These include:

- Hoarseness
- Bleeding
- Infection
- Abnormal heart rate
- Pneumothorax (collapsed lung)
- Injury to other structures in the chest
- Respiratory failure (rare)
- Nerve damage
- Death (rare)
During the Procedure

Following is what will happen during the procedure:

• Once you’re asleep, an incision is made at the base of the neck.
• A scope is passed through the incision down into the mediastinum.
• Then a biopsy instrument is passed through the center of the scope.
• After the lymph node samples are taken, the instrument is pulled up through the scope.
• The samples are then tested for cancer or other problems.
Recovery from Mediastinoscopy

You may feel groggy and sore after the procedure. You may need to stay in the hospital for 1 to 2 days. This is so staff can monitor your health and manage your pain. Once at home, slowly ease back into normal activities. Follow your doctor’s instructions carefully. And be sure to make and keep all follow-up appointments.

In the Hospital

After your procedure, you’re sent to a recovery room to recover from the anesthesia. Nurses continue to check on you. If you have pain, be sure to tell your nurses. They will give you pain medication when needed. In some cases, an IV line provides fluids and pain medication. To help keep your lungs clear, improve breathing, and prevent infection, a healthcare provider teaches you a breathing exercise called incentive spirometry. It should be done every hour or so. Also, depending on your condition, a nurse or other healthcare provider helps you get up and walk soon after the procedure. This is to keep your blood moving and help prevent infection.

At Home

Once at home, be sure to:
- Avoid lifting more than 5 to 10 lbs.
- Limit strenuous activity.
- Take pain medication as directed.
- Return to work and drive a car only when your doctor says it’s okay.
- Continue doing incentive spirometry.

When to Call the Doctor
- Redness or swelling of skin at incision sites
- Drainage at incision sites
- Uncontrolled or increased pain
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid heart rate
- Fever of 101.1°F (38.5°C) or higher
Getting Your Test Results

It will likely take a few days to get back your test results. During this time you may feel anxious. You’re likely worried about cancer and what the next step is for your health. Your doctor will discuss the results with you in detail. He or she will explain any follow-up care or treatment you need. Be sure to share any concerns you have with your doctor.

If You Have Lung Cancer

You may be referred to one or more cancer specialists for further testing. Other diagnostic procedures may be needed to see how far along the cancer is. These help provide more information about your condition so your doctor can create the best treatment plan for you. Possible treatments include more surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation.

If You Have Another Lung or Chest Problem

Your doctor will discuss treatment with you. If you’re given medication, follow your doctor’s instructions carefully. And continue to make and keep all follow-up visits. These visits help your doctor monitor your health.
Moving Forward

If you’ve been diagnosed with cancer or another serious lung or chest problem, you’re likely feeling scared or confused. There are people you can talk to who understand what you’re going through. Your healthcare providers and the organizations listed below can offer you and your family support.